What is this, fucking Jeopardy?

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What is this, fucking Jeopardy?

by lumosatnight

Summary

Draco is struck by a wayward curse of unknown origin and keeps trying to get Curse-Breaker Potter to help him. It's rather frustrating that he seems to be so busy… and that Draco can only speak to him in questions. Draco's at his wit's end trying to get oblivious Potter to realise why he's bothering him, and Harry won't stop making obscure Muggle references. Like the last time, when he just stared at Draco before yelling "What is this, fucking Jeopardy?!" before walking away.

Notes

Thanks for the amazingly hilarious prompt (#46)! I had fun with it.

Shout out to the mods for hosting ClueFest! It really tickles my mystery-loving heart. And a huge thank you to Blue_Posey and thepumat for being spectacular betas. Your advice and comments were invaluable!

The banner was made by the lovely TheFrancakes. Thank you 💚

See the end of the work for more notes

Are you Harry Potter?

Draco slapped a hand on the immense wooden desk currently blocking his entrance to the Ministry of Magic's Division of Magical Security and Subdivision under Bank Safety—MoM's DoMS and SuBS for short. It was a working title, thank Salazar, for Draco snorted every time he thought about it.

"Is Curse-Breaker Potter here? Can I speak with him?" he huffed.

The secretary did not look up from the paper in her hands as she responded in a bored voice. "Welcome to DoMS and SuBS. Do you have an appointment?"

Her hair was a startling purple and with the sides shaved, it should have been a ridiculous haircut, but somehow it worked on her. Draco wondered what he would look like with such a hairstyle and internally winced. With his pale skin tone, he would look like a bloody fairy instead of a *stylish young professional* as his mother called it. Growing his hair out past his shoulders was already enough experimenting for him.

"Don't I have an appointment? Is it an urgent situation?"

"Sir, you tell me. Is it an urgent situation?" The secretary looked up from her paper, blowing a large pink bubble in Draco's direction and letting it pop loudly. "Why do you need to see Curse-Breaker Potter?"

"Does he need to help me?" Draco demanded.

"Right… sir." She shoved a clipboard across the desk. "If you just fill out this form here with your information. We'll get back to you within two to five business days."

"What if I can't wait that long?"

The secretary sighed, pushing her overly large glasses up the bridge of her nose. “As I said before, sir, you will have to submit this form—”

There was a loud crash, and the door to the first office on the left burst open.

“I’ll be out for the afternoon!” Potter rushed past, throwing a red and gold scarf around his neck. “Goblins are having trouble again. If Ron stops by, tell him I’m gonna have to cancel on dinner tonight.”

“Got it, boss.” The secretary rolled her eyes, obviously used to Potter’s hasty instructions.

At this point, Potter noticed Draco standing by the front desk and gave him an odd look, but with a shrug, he continued on his way.

“Potter, can you—” Draco called. “Can you wait a moment?”

But Potter had already sprinted away.

“Well, is he coming back?” Draco said, annoyed.

The secretary ignored him, propping her boots up on the desk, and blew another obscenely large bubble, smacking her lips.

“Are you even listening to me?”

When she did not respond, Draco plopped down into the single chair on the opposite side of the desk. He needed to see Potter to get this stupid curse sorted. No matter how long it took, no matter what else happened, he would wait.

The secretary glanced at him—she couldn’t have been much younger than Draco, at least in her early twenties—and sighed again, her dangling gold nose ring quivering with the huff of air.

They spent the rest of the afternoon like that, sitting silently on opposite sides of the immense wooden desk.

Other visitors walked past, waving to the secretary, wishing her a good day, and flashing Draco covert looks, but still, Draco did not budge. A Curse-Breaker with flaming red hair stopped by the front desk at some point and handed over a bar of chocolate, which the secretary quickly stashed away in a drawer.

“Nicked it from my brothers’ shop,” he said, winking. “It’s their newest flavour.” With a charming smile, he disappeared into the office in the far back corner.

“Who was that?” Draco felt oddly unsettled by his appearance, a niggling familiarity that he couldn’t quite place.

“Why should I tell you?” the secretary responded briskly and went back to ignoring him.

Draco huffed, crossing his arms, and resigned himself to counting the cracks on the ceiling.

Nearly an hour later, a ministry worker in dashing blue robes dropped by. He was a tall fellow with a nice, luscious beard and body that filled out his robes nicely. Upon seeing Draco slouched back in his chair, his eyes went comically wide and a pink blush crept onto his cheeks.

Now, *him* —Draco could remember. What was it, only last Saturday, that Draco had rubbed up against him at a club in Muggle London? Blaise had insisted that "You really gotta loosen up. You've been so stiff lately. Go find someone to snog for the evening and get your rocks off with," so he'd dragged Draco to a blaring club with pulsing lights where Draco had indeed found someone to 'get his rocks off with' in a deserted bathroom stall with saliva-slicked hands. Though Draco regretted it after—those toilets really were filthy.

But here he was, the someone from last weekend—Draco hadn't even bothered remembering his name—that Draco had no intention of ever seeing again after he had reattached his pants (and dignity) to his person and escaped the club without so much as a goodbye called over his shoulder. So much for going to a Muggle club to avoid running into anyone magical. He was going to smack Blaise upside the head the next time he had the chance.

Draco turned his head away, his fingers twitching against his thighs, as the man approached the front desk.

"Um." He handed a stack of papers over to the secretary. "These are for Curse-Breaker Potter to sign, regarding his injury last month." He peeked at Draco then quickly looked away again. Draco stiffened in his chair. "Tell him we need them back by the end of the week."

"No problem," said the secretary, her eyes tracking between them animatedly. "I'll get these to him right away."

"Thanks." He glanced at Draco again. *Godamnit,* Draco wished he would stop making things so bleeding obvious. "I'll just, uh, go then." He was so close to turning and walking away—only one more centimetre swivel to the right—when he suddenly seemed to make up his mind and stopped to face Draco completely.

Draco swore softly under his breath.

"Draco… uh, hey… I was wondering if, uh, you wanted to maybe…"

The secretary raised a purple eyebrow across the desk, and Draco hated her nosy eavesdropping even though he would've been doing the exact same thing if their situations were reversed.

"Can I just stop you right there?" interrupted Draco. This had gone on long enough. "If I was interested, don't you think I would have—I don't know maybe— *acted a bit more interested?"*

The man stepped back, stunned by Draco's onslaught, a harsh blush creeping red down his neck.

“Oh, um, okay…. Nevermind then. Forget I said anything.” He scrambled away, eager to get as far away from Draco as possible, and in the next second, he was speeding into the lift and smashing the button to be transported off.

The secretary pushed back from the desk, leaning back in her chair, and regarded Draco with narrowed eyes.

“You didn’t have to be a dick about it.”

It was true. He probably needn’t have been *quite* so harsh, but in his experience, it was better to put them off early rather than wait until they started stalking his flat every night, or worse, wait until they inevitably fell in love with Draco then blamed him when he didn’t return their feelings.

“What would you say is better then, hurting their pride a little bit now or leading them on when I have no interest and crushing their fragile little hearts later?”

After some contemplative gum chewing, she said, “Well, neither, but I guess you aren’t nice enough to let them down easy.”

Draco scowled at her. He could be plenty nice if he wanted to be. It just so happened that he didn’t want to be nice the majority of the time, because most people didn’t deserve his niceness.

“How did you two meet?” she asked, popping another bubble.

“Why should I tell you?” Draco said waspishly, repeating back her own words from earlier.

She rolled her eyes at him and went back to stacking papers. Draco had no idea if she was actually working—it all looked pretty useless to him.

Another hour passed and still, Potter did not return.

“You know…” the secretary said. Draco jerked in his chair. He had zoned out a while ago, daydreaming about how a scoop of caramel cobwebs ice cream would be lovely just about now. “He’s probably not coming back today.”

“Who?” Draco flexed his foot which had fallen asleep. He wiped a hand across his cheek. Had he been drooling?

“Curse-Breaker Potter. You *are* here to see him, right?” She was looking at Draco like he had completely lost the plot. Maybe he had, and that was why he had just spent the entire afternoon slouching in this appallingly uncomfortable chair. “If you really want to see him, try coming back tomorrow. He’ll be in around eight.”

“Why are you only telling me this now and not before?” Draco hissed as he gently set his sleeping foot on the ground, pins and needles attacking his toes. “Should I be thanking you?”

“Whatever. I tried.” She threw a bag over her shoulder, pulling a denim jacket from beneath the desk.

“Are you leaving?” Draco felt strangely discomfited by the idea, though he had only known her for a few hours now.

“Yes…” she said slowly, giving him an odd look. “You might not have noticed, but it’s almost five. The ministry will be closing soon.”

Draco swivelled around, his recovering foot protesting, and noticed the closed doors and lack of literally any other people wandering about.

The secretary waved her wand, a layer of magic settling over the desk and securing everything in place. “You’re welcome to stay if you want, as long as you don’t touch anything. You’ll regret it if you do.” She flashed her wand then, grinning—more like smirking—at him.

Draco glared at her in the dim hallway lights. “Is that a threat?”

She shrugged. “Just a warning. Standard procedure, really.”

And with that, she strode towards the lift and whooshed out of sight.

Draco debated hobbling after her on his one good foot but thought better of it. He didn’t need to embarrass himself anymore than what he was already being subjected to. It was bad enough waiting for Saviour Potter all afternoon, and now he had to come back *again.* Merlin, could this week get any worse?

~ ? ~

Draco arrived promptly at eight the next morning and plopped down into the single chair across the front desk to DoMS and SuBS—they really, *really* needed to come up with a better name.

The secretary was already there, batting away the floating memos and scolding them when they pecked at her shoulder. She greeted him with a curt, “Mr. Malfoy, you’re back,” and a flip of purple hair, to which Draco responded snarkily, “What else would I be spending my precious time doing besides waiting for the great and fearsome Harry Potter?”

She rolled her eyes at him, which was starting to become a familiar gesture after their extended period of time together yesterday.

At twenty past, Draco stood from his chair. He placed both hands on the desk and leaned forward until he towered over her.

“Were you lying yesterday when you told me Curse-Breaker Potter would be here? Or is he always this abominably late?”

The secretary—Draco should probably learn her name at some point—gave him an unimpressed stare, one of such utter annoyance that it rivalled the likes of his father. Thankfully, Draco had lots of experience with disappointing his father and was not deterred in the slightest.

“WHERE IS HE?” he shouted across the desk.

A beat.

“Oh no,” said the secretary, completely deadpan. She dropped the memo she was holding and it drifted slowly to the floor as both she and Draco watched. “You startled me. Whatever will I do to recover my poor nerves?”

“How about you tell me where Curse-Breaker Potter is?”

She remained staring at Draco, her face like stone, and pointed a black-painted nail down at the floor.

“Pick it up.” It was more of a command than a request.

Draco glared at her and she glared right back. He was *not* going to be bending down to retrieve the memo for her, he decided, and he was perfectly capable of winning a glaring contest, thank his father very much.

Except that, a full minute later, Draco’s eyes were as dry as the Sahara Desert and he desperately needed to blink. Yet, the secretary still remained unfazed.

With a huff, Draco admitted defeat and walked around to the other side of the desk to retrieve the memo, grumbling loudly all the while, “Why should I be the one to pick it up? Am *I* the one who dropped it?”

It was at that moment that the lift dinged and the patter of footsteps grew louder.

“Morning, Ning. Sorry I’m late. Got delayed. Anything on my schedule this morning?”

“Morning, Harry. You have a client here to see—”

Draco sprang up from the floor, bumping his elbow against the edge of the desk and jostling the secretary—Ning was her name; Draco supposed he could remember that—out of the way, who grunted in surprise.

“Is it Potter? Is Potter here?”

The door to the first office on the left was cracked ajar with Potter’s shaggy head disappearing inside it.

Draco lunged towards the door and barged into the room.

Potter’s office was criminally small, cluttered with Muggle picture frames and odd trinkets that Draco wouldn’t have been surprised if Potter had filched directly from Dumbledore’s old office.

Potter was in the process of removing his coat—a scrappy Muggle atrocity with grey patches on the sleeves—and didn’t appear to notice Draco’s presence in the cramped office.

“Why do you look like shit?” Draco wrinkled his nose at the brown stain on the front of Potter’s threadbare T-shirt.

Potter finally looked up at Draco. “Malfoy,” he said, his face unreadable.

“Am I obviously Malfoy?”

“Uhh… what... yes…” And *wow,* wasn’t Potter just the most eloquent person to ever exist? “Someone spilt coffee on me on the train this morning.” He poked at the brown stain with his wand, probably determining if it was worth a Cleaning Spell or a tried and tested cycle through the wash. Draco knew from experience that most stains, including coffee or bloodstains, required a thorough washing. Potter sighed and lowered his wand, ultimately deciding to deal with the stain later.

Draco crept further into Potter’s office, intrigued despite his best efforts.

“Do you always take Muggle transportation to work?”

“Yes.” Potter sat down at his desk and looked over the top of his glasses at Draco. “You have something against that?”

Draco flushed faintly. He may not have been the most Muggle-knowledgeable, but he was a whole lot more accepting than he used to be when his life had revolved around Hogwarts, Mother’s letters, and Father’s money.

Draco made a face to hide his flush and said in his most scathing ‘you’re-being-an-idiot’ voice, “Why not just Floo?”

“Helps clear my head before work.”

“Why would you need to do that? Isn’t it already empty?” Draco plopped down into the chair across from Potter, ready to banter to the death. He was ready for Potter’s next barb when Potter sighed and said instead:

“Okay… so Malfoy. What can I help you with?”

Potter was looking at him wearily and Draco slumped. He’d have to save all of his witty insults until later when Potter wasn’t faking politeness.

“Have I been cursed? Have I been attacked?”

“I don’t know…” Potter’s eyes scanned over Draco, and Draco felt a weird tingly sensation. “Have you?”

“Have I?”

“Okay…” Potter said, clearly getting frustrated by Draco’s vague answers. “What kind of curse was it?”

Draco leaned forward. Now they were finally getting somewhere. “Is it some kind of tongue twister curse? Why can’t I say what I want?”

“You certainly seem to be saying whatever you want,” Potter grumbled. Which, *rude,* but also entirely beside the point.

“No, why can’t I stop talking in—”

“You definitely don’t have any problem talking.” Okay, Potter was just being difficult on purpose now.

"Potter, why aren't you listening to me!?"

And Potter was just about to respond and Draco thought he was finally going to get some answers when…

“Harry!” Granger shouldered her way through the door, nearly dropping a stack of papers that were so tall they were completely covering her face. “Oh, thank Godric you’re here. These new vaults we found in Ireland: it’s just a mess.” She set the stack of papers on the edge of Potter’s desk—it was a miracle they didn’t topple over, but she must have charmed them—and belatedly noticed Draco.

“Oh! Uh, hello Malfoy. I didn’t see you there,” she said, her bushy eyebrows pulling together.

And *yes,* Draco had been here the entire time, thanks for finally noticing.

“Why are you interrupting us?” he blurted.

He didn’t mean for it to sound so rude, but of course Potter took it that way because over the top of the desk, he frowned at Draco and said, “Malfoy was just on his way out.”

“Was I *not* on my way out?” Draco demanded. “Am I a client? Do I have rights?”

“Right,” said Potter, nonplussed. He had his wand out again and was waving it at Draco’s chair.

The next thing Draco knew, he was being levitated out of Potter’s tiny office—chair and all—and landing firmly back in the outside hallway, the door slamming behind him.

“Am I not done talking to you yet?!” he yelled at the closed door, jumping up from the chair.

The *nerve* of him, kicking Draco out just like that! Draco remembered quite vividly why they never used to get along.

Secretary Ning snickered and Draco glared at her. She turned away, munching on some candy bar or another, and Draco made a rude hand gesture behind her back. He collected whatever dignity he could muster—which wasn’t a lot at his point having been dismissed by bloody Potter *again* —and stomped down the hall to the lifts.

Contrary to what Potter's snarky secretary might believe, Draco did actually have his own job to get back to so he couldn't stay and loiter outside Potter's office all day every day. Yesterday had been the exception, of course, but Draco knew he'd be paying for that tonight.

Draco pressed the button in the lift and rode in huffy silence down the few floors to the Artefacts Restoration and Superannuated Evidence Department—ARSED for short. Good lord, what was with the ministry and their ludicrous naming?

Stepping out of the lift, he stomped past Theo who nodded briefly but was too focused on his own project to acknowledge Draco further—even back in school Theo had never been the most sociable—and he settled into his own station. Ever since the horrid events of sixth year, including the vanishing cabinet, scars-that-shall-not-be-named, and other questionable choices-that-shall-not-be-mentioned, Draco realised that he was *good* at fixing magical artefacts and the like. Not only was he good, but he *enjoyed* tinkering with broken possessions, making small adjustments until he felt something click and had him humming with pride.

So, when the trials had ended and he'd insisted to Mother that he wanted a *proper job,* that had been how he'd found himself working here in the Magical Artefacts Department at the bottom of the ministry. It wasn't the best paying job, and it certainly wasn't the most prestigious, but still, Draco enjoyed it and if he got to try inventing some of his own magical creations under the table, well, that was nice too.

His current projects were a mix of creating a replica of Moody's old expandable trunk (the Aurors had finally acknowledged Moody's brilliance and that had extended to his belongings), creating climate-controlled trellises that would be added to all Hogwarts greenhouses next year (Neville Longbottom had requested them in a truly awkward office visit), fixing some old lady's musty music box that was "essential to the quality of my daily life" (Draco personally thought it was just a finicky, old music box but he would do what he could to fix it), and lastly, working on his beloved side project, massage pads that could send electric pulses to massage any part of the body just by placing the pads on the shoulders. It was originally a Muggle device, but Draco found that with the right adjustments, he could easily tweak it for more fine-tuned magical use.

Draco worked through the rest of the day and well into the afternoon, mindless to everything else around him. It wouldn't be the first time he was so entranced by his projects that he forgot to eat lunch, but he should really stop making such a habit of it. By the time he straightened up from his workstation and stretched his sore back, it was nearing eight o'clock. Theo had left hours ago, as had the rest of the ministry, so it was just Draco with his projects and his empty stomach. His stomach growled at him disapprovingly and Draco shushed it back into silence.

Packing up and locking his station, he hurried to the lifts, eager to get to the ministry atrium as soon as possible. If he was quick enough, he may be able to stop at the little stand near his flat that sold excellent steak and kidney pies. Although given the time, they were probably already packing up for the night, and then Draco would have to scrounge up something to eat from his meagre kitchen which hadn't been restocked in days.

Draco hurried faster, smashing the buttons impatiently, ready to escape as soon as the lift doors opened.

The lift doors creaked open—Rowena's riches, were they always this slow?—and Draco sprinted into the empty ministry atrium.

Or, at least Draco thought it was empty until he crashed knee first into another occupant and sent them both sprawling to the floor.

"Fuck," said the unfortunate victim of Draco's bony knee, followed by a pained groan.

It was Potter.

Because of course it was Potter. Who else would be wandering around the ministry at such a ghastly hour? Who else would Draco literally run into with his terrible luck?

Draco struggled to right himself just as Potter was doing the same next to him. He should apologise, right? The entire point was to get Curse-Breaker Potter to help him, which meant Potter had to, at the bare minimum, not think that Draco was out to get him.

"Am I sorry? Are you okay?" Bloody hell. He couldn't even properly apologise because of this blasted curse. He tried to reach out to help Potter up instead, but Potter flinched back, his chest heaving, his black hair in disarray.

And fuck Draco with a Nimbus 3000, Potter was attractive like that—staring at Draco through his black fringe, his cheeks flushed. No, that couldn't be right. Potter was an oaf, a potentially useful oaf who could cure Draco's current speaking predicament, but an oaf nonetheless. So why was Draco hit with the dazzling feeling of wanting to lean closer until he was pressed snug against Potter's side, until he was wrapped up in Potter's arms, Potter's face bending towards Draco's?

"Don't…" said Potter. Don't what? Potter couldn't read minds suddenly, could he? Potter gingerly climbed to his feet and Draco followed because he couldn't have Potter being taller than him. That just wouldn't do. Potter ran a hand over his thigh, massaging the spot where Draco must have kneed him.

Draco took a step towards him, but Potter put up a hand.

"Don't touch… just. It's fine." His shoulders tensed and his jaw worked around nothing.

Draco was at a loss. That didn't happen very often, but being around Potter always tilted him off balance. "Are you hurt? Can I help? Why are you here? How's your leg? Do you need a Healer?"

Potter stared at him for one agonising moment then yelled way louder than necessary, "What's with all the bloody questions? What is this, fucking Jeopardy?!"

"What's Jeopardy?" said Draco.

“It’s an American television progr—you know what, I’m just gonna go.” He started teetering towards the lift. “Have a good night, Malfoy.”

Draco power-walked after him. How was Potter so spritely even with an injured leg? “Potter, can you just give me a second? Can I talk to you about the cur—”

“Look, Malfoy.” Potter reached the lift and swivelled to face Draco again, leaning heavily to one side. “I’ve had a really long day and I still have a hippogriff’s worth of paperwork to go through. If you really want to talk, just stop by my office tomorrow and my secretary can get you an appointment.”

Which, *honestly,* it wasn’t like Draco hadn’t tried doing that already— *twice.*

“But Potter, can I just—”

The lift doors squeaked closed, and Draco was left in the atrium alone, his question trailing off into thin air.

~ ? ~

The next morning Draco arrived promptly at eight again and slammed a hand down on Secretary Ning’s desk.

In his hand there was a meticulously prepared note for one Curse-Breaker Potter explaining in *vivid, heart-wrenching detail* the many inconveniences of his current speech impediment. Draco had been up most of the night writing the letter, because what was Draco supposed to say to Harry fucking Potter, Savior of the Wizarding World and also possibly-still-hated-him childhood rival?

“Back again, Draco?” said Secretary Ning, eyeing him up from the other side of the desk. And, well, that was new. She certainly hadn’t called him Draco yesterday when she was snickering at his misfortunes, or the day before that when he was wallowing in silence. Maybe he was finally getting somewhere with Potter’s snarky secretary. He could play nice if she was.

“How could I resist coming to see you, Ning?” He batted his eyelashes at her. He knew they were exceptionally long and lustrous; many a bloke had commented on them. Granted, this was usually when they were chatting him up at the club and trying to convince Draco to blow them in the loo.

Ning rolled her eyes at him, almost fondly, and went about snatching the memos from the air.

They settled into their opposite chairs and waited.

Five minutes later, Draco heard the snick of a drawer opening and looked over to see Ning chewing on yet another candy bar while reading through a memo.

“Do you have an entire drawer full of just sweets?” he said, peering over the top of the desk for a peek.

“Yes, don’t judge me.” She slammed the drawer closed. “I need *something* to do while I fill out all these forms.” She contemplated something for a moment then said, “You ever tried a KitKat before?”

“What’s that?”

“A KitKat.” Ning reached back into the drawer and flopped a package down in front of Draco. “It’s chocolate with layers of wafer inside.”

Draco eyed the Muggle sweet with trepidation, but he eventually decided that if Ning was trying to poison him she was much too smart to do it on ministry property. “Are you sure this is chocolate?” he said, opening the package and finding a set of 2 green bars inside.

“That one’s matcha flavoured. I got it when I went on holiday in Japan. They have much better flavours over there.”

Draco brought it closer to his face and sniffed it. “Why does it smell like tea?”

“Matcha, green tea. It’s basically the same thing.” Ning shrugged.

Deciding that green tea wouldn’t be so bad, Draco took a tentative bite. The moan that left his mouth was completely involuntary and Draco would have hidden under Ning’s desk in embarrassment if anyone else were around to hear it.

Even so, Ning did raise a purple eyebrow at the sound. “So, do you like it?”

“Do I like it?” Draco finished off the last bar with a final crunch.

Ning tossed another package across the desk. “Here, have another one.”

“Why is this one a different green?”

“It’s a different flavour.” She had an odd little smile on her face.

He flipped the packaging around, inspecting the Japanese characters. Now, Draco knew less than a shrivelfig’s worth of Japanese, so he had no idea what any of it meant, and he was moderately sure that Ning knew exactly minus five words in Japanese as well. But he supposed between the two of them, she would know best, seeing as they were her sweets.

He took another bite, this one not tentative at all, nearly shoving the whole bar in his mouth at once.

Which was a dreadful idea because he ended up hacking his lungs out in the next second.

Helga’s horntail, this was horrible. His tongue felt like it was about to burn off and his throat was on fire. He spat the half-chewed bar into the bin by his feet, dry heaving until he could no longer feel each burning piece of candy dissolving on his tongue. His long hair fell around his flushed face, so at least *that* was shielded from nosy onlookers if there were any.

“WHAT THE HELL WAS THAT?” he spluttered, coming back up for air.

“Wasabi.” She was doing that odd little smile again, which Draco belatedly realised was her trying to stifle her laughter.

“Why did I ever trust you? Are you enjoying this?”

At that, her face cracked and then she was truly smiling—grinning ridiculously from ear to ear—and cackling loudly. “Merlin, your face. You should have seen…” she choked out. “It’s so red, you look like a Gryffindor.”

And now that was one step too far. How dare she compare him to a reckless Gryffindor! That was the lowest of the low. Draco gave her his fiercest glare, which probably wasn’t all that fierce at the moment given his frazzled state, and sat back stiffly in his chair.

“Oh, come on, Draco. It was only a bit of fun.” She tossed yet another green chocolate bar across the desk. “Here, take this.” When Draco did not budge a single inch, she huffed and said, “I promise this one’s not spicy. Edamame flavoured. See?” She tapped the package right over the drawing of a miniature green-coloured bean.

Draco leaned over to take a closer look, and someone cleared their throat loudly behind him.

Both Ning and Draco jumped at the sound, but she was the first to recover.

“Oh, hi Harry,” she said brightly, then deflated slightly at Potter’s stony expression. “Your first appointment is here.”

“And that would be Malfoy?” Potter gave Draco a quick once over, and Draco got that weird tingly sensation again. “Come in, I guess.”

What a state Draco was in for his first *real* appointment with Potter. Was his face still red? Was he still sweating? He probably looked like he’d just stepped off the Quidditch pitch or finished an impressive shag, which was *not* the impression he was going for. Draco cast a quick Freshening Charm then followed after Potter into his small office.

He glanced back one more time at Ning. She gave him a wink—so fast Draco was unsure if he’d imagined it—and went back to sorting the memos. He saw her pick up the remainder of the wasabi KitKat and pop it in her mouth, not even flinching at the taste.

Draco shuddered and slid through the door.

“So Malfoy...” Potter was already sitting at his desk, scraggly coat hung on the rack, his biceps bulging through an even more worn-out Muggle T-shirt than yesterday. And what? Since when had Draco started noticing Potter’s biceps? “You wanted to talk to me about a curse?”

“Could you read this first?” Draco slid his *very well thought-out* note across the desk, averting his gaze from Potter’s unseemly biceps.

Had Potter always been this fit? Surely not back at Hogwarts, or Draco would have noticed far sooner. Draco had known as soon as the Yule Ball had ended and Pansy kissed him goodnight in the Slytherin common room that he was as straight as a flobberworm during the

rainy season—aka not bloody at all—so he wasn't surprised when he later found himself attracted to the male form. However, he had never been attracted to Potter, so that development was new *and* surprising. Usually, Potter was an insufferable twat who somehow managed to rile Draco up to the point of foaming at the mouth just by the sight of his ridiculous hair.

Absolutely ridiculous hair that Draco now ached to reach over and touch for some goddamn reason. He clenched his hands together and twiddled his thumbs to prevent doing such a disastrous thing while Potter read over his note.

After a long while, Potter set the note down and looked at Draco through his glasses. "So you can only speak in questions?"

"Can I?" said Draco, trying not to fidget under Potter's piercing stare.

"And you don't know who cursed you? You were just walking by the park one day and then suddenly, *boom,* cursed?"

Ahh, there it was. And this was why Draco had never been attracted to Potter before. He was a complete and utter idiot.

Draco huffed in exasperation. "Didn't you read the note?"

Potter didn't respond for a moment, leaning back and tapping his fingers across the desk in an easy rhythm. Had Potter's hands always been that big? Big and smooth, golden brown skin giving way to veiny muscle?

"What's my name?" Potter said suddenly.

Draco was startled out of his reverie and blurted, "Are you Harry Potter?"

"What's the date today? Where are we right now?"

"Are we really doing this?" What was this? A Veritaserum test? Draco huffed. He would answer anyway, but it didn't mean he needed to be happy about it. "Is today the second of April? Are we at your crappy little office at the ministry?"

The corner of Potter's mouth ticked, like he was hiding a smile.

"What happens if you try to say a regular sentence?"

"What do you think I've been doing?" Draco wanted to whip his wand out and hex Potter's stupid smirking mouth.

"And you already tried casting a Finite Incantatem?"

Draco glared at him because of course he'd already cast a bloody *Finite Incantatem.* That was the first thing he had tried. Maybe Potter really was a pillock and this was all a waste of time.

“Alright… just…” Potter squinted behind his glasses, thinking deeply. Now there was a first. “Maybe it’s an Imperius Curse type situation, and you just have to break past the initial compulsion.”

Draco didn’t say anything, because that did kind of make sense (possibly) and he was never going to admit that to Potter on the first go around. If Potter was right then Draco was screwed because he had always been pants at controlling his compulsions. For example, his unhealthy compulsion to bash in Potter’s skull every time they had crossed paths starting at age eleven.

“Here, let’s try one more time.” Potter looked up at Draco earnestly, and were his eyes always that green? “What’s my name?”

Alright, Draco would give it a whirl, he supposed, since Potter was looking at him so hopefully. He struggled for a moment, the words refusing to cooperate on his tongue.

“Are you—”

Shit.

“Is it—”

Shit.

“Is this—”

Shit. Shit. Shit.

“ARE YOU HARRY FUCKING POTTER?” he finally shouted.

This was horrible, terrible, the absolute fucking worst.

“Wow,” said Harry fucking Potter.

And then he laughed. And laughed and laughed and laughed. He laughed so hard he almost fell out of his chair and had to steady himself by grabbing onto the edge of the desk. He laughed so hard his stupidly handsome face lit up like the morning sun, golden and captivating. Potter's laugh was a horrendously obnoxious sound, worse than a banshee screaming during the witching hour—too much wheezing and not enough restraint. Draco was disgusted and fascinated in equal measure.

But, Draco refused to show any of his feelings on the matter so he unwrapped the last of Ning’s KitKats—while glaring stunners at Potter—and bit down hard, chewing far more aggressively than usual. Whatever flavour edamame was, it wasn’t bad—kinda savoury, a little salty. He’d thank Ning later if he ever forgave her for tricking him earlier.

“Oh, this is too good.” Potter, the unbearable git, took off his glasses and wiped at his eyes.

Was Potter laughing so hard he was *crying* at Draco’s misfortunes? Preposterous. But he had to check just to make sure.

“Are you crying?” said Draco.

“Absolutely not.” Potter giggled one last time and popped his glasses back on. “That would be very unprofessional of me.”

“Are you a professional then?” Draco sneered. “How have I not noticed?”

There it was again! The corner of Potter’s mouth ticked, like he was trying to suppress a smile.

Draco slumped in his chair, ready for an epic sulk, his head bobbing forward and his long blonde hair falling into his face. With a sigh, he brushed the strands back behind his ear and resigned himself to enduring the rest of the meeting with a too smug Potter.

Potter had gone quiet now and seemed to have zoned out, staring in the direction of Draco’s hand. Draco dropped his hand onto the desk. Potter glanced away.

He cleared his throat and looked back at Draco.

“So, it looks like a pretty standard case of a curse gone haywire. Under normal circumstances, I would suggest going straight to St. Mungo’s to get sorted, but—”

“Why in bloody Merlin would I ever go there, with the atrocious way they treated Mother after the war?” Draco was positively appalled. He was never going back to St. Mungo’s after they had refused to treat Mother’s Cruciatus Curse damage because of their family’s former Death Eater status. *Never.* “Why haven't I sued them yet? How can they still call themselves a functioning hospital?”

“Yes, I thought you may have an aversion to going there,” said Potter. He sounded almost sympathetic. “So I've come up with an alternative. I think the counter-curse should be pretty easy to discern. I have, uh, some time in my schedule today around five if you're amenable.”

And well, that was more than Draco expected Potter to offer. “And what if I’m not… amenable… to meeting at five today?” he hedged, struggling to speak. The idea of being alone with Potter in his office after ministry hours was doing strange things to his already botched speaking skills.

“Well,” said Potter, taking a second to run something through that absurdly shaggy head of his. “We could always try to schedule something tomorrow during the day, but I can’t promise I’ll have any availability then.”

Draco considered. It really wouldn’t be *that* bad. He already got home late most nights as it was; what was one more?

“Is today fine?”

“Yes, that’s what I just—Oh, is that your answer then?” Potter waited for Draco to confirm, but Draco did not deign to respond. It should have been obvious. If Potter truly wasn’t as much of a dimwit as Draco was starting to believe, then he should be able to understand.

“Alright then.” Potter pulled a notebook from inside his desk, a planner with atrocious handwriting scribbled all over the margins. “At five okay for you? I’m afraid that’s the only spot I have free since it will be the end of the day and my boss can’t give me any last-minute projects. I know this is technically after work hours, but—”

“Is five fine?” Draco interjected.

“Okay then.” The words *Appt w/ Malfoy 5pm* scribbled themselves into a square in Potter’s planner. That was some complex charm work right there, to record appointments automatically without the use of a quill. Draco bet all of the contents in his Gringotts vault that it was one of Granger’s creations. Potter closed the planner and put it away again.

“Well,” Potter said gracelessly. “See you later, Malfoy.”

And Draco wasn’t about to overstay his welcome. He stood from the chair, walking smoothly towards the door. He felt Potter’s stare burning into him from behind.

At the last second, he came to a decision and tilted his head to look over his shoulder back at Potter.

“Can you, uh, call me Draco?” Why was he so nervous all of a sudden? “Doesn’t Malfoy sound too much like my father?”

“Sure.” Potter paused. “Draco.”

He noticeably didn’t say to call him Harry back, which was *fair*. They hadn’t really been on cordial terms for very long—a couple minutes at most. Draco found himself lingering awkwardly in the doorway.

“So… am I seeing you later?”

“Yeah, I’ll see you later.” Potter gave him a weird sort of glazed smile, like he was zoning out again. Why were his eyes so damn green?

Draco left, feeling a strange tightness in his chest, a fluttering warmth. Why did Draco feel so flushed just from Potter using his first name?

Potter shut the door swiftly behind him. At least he didn’t slam it this time.

Secretary Ning’s desk was empty, thank Salazar. If she had caught sight of Draco’s flushed face, she would have been laughing for days and he had already had enough people laughing at his misfortunes to last him a lifetime—or at least the rest of the week.

~ ? ~

Draco returned to his workstation and threw himself into his projects for the rest of the day. He even remembered to eat lunch this time. At a quarter to five, Theo ran past, waving goodbye—he was always dipping early, the wanker, but Draco didn’t care enough to snitch on him, and Theo still completed all his work on time.

At exactly five o'clock, Draco was once again standing outside the door to Potter's office. Ning's desk was empty; she must have slacked off early like Theo had. Draco glanced around the empty hallway and snuck around the side of Ning's massive desk. It was even more massive than Potter's and *she* was supposed to be the secretary.

He tried to remember which drawer she kept her sweet stash in. Those wicked KitKats really were pretty good. Draco could admit that the Muggles did have good taste in *some* things. He reached for the nearest drawer and received a sharp zap to his hand. Dammit, Ning had warded her desk well.

If he had time, Draco was confident he could unravel the wards, but would it be worth Ning's wrath later?

He was just making a detailed mental list of the pros and cons of disabling Ning's wards and stealing some more KitKats when Potter's door sprung open and Potter waved him inside. Guess that settled Draco's dilemma.

As soon as Draco was inside and seated, Potter shut the door then proceeded to ignore him. He was talking into a thin metal box at his ear and periodically shaking his messy locks in frustration.

Had Potter gone loony? Why was he talking to no one?

"Yeah, mate, I know." There was a long pause. "Look, it's not like that."

Potter let out an impatient sigh, his forehead wrinkling—and dammit, why were wrinkles even attractive on Potter? "Hullo? Ron?" He held the metal box out in front of him and shook it a couple of times. He looked like a complete nutter, and yet this was who Draco had asked to help him.

Potter brought the box back to his ear. Draco heard muted screeching sounds coming out of it. Potter obviously heard them too for he flinched back, before saying loudly, "Anyways, I gotta go. I'll talk to you and Hermione later."

There was another pause, then Potter said softer, "Yeah, I'm sorry for missing dinner again, alright? I'll make it up to you next week." More screeching sounds and Potter winced. "Fuck, I forgot they were coming over tonight. Say hi for me… Dean's little brother is there too? Leo?... Yeah, yeah, alright… I'll set something up with them this weekend before he's sent back to Hogwarts. I still don't know why Dean wants me to talk to him so much. It's not like I know anything about disciplining teenagers. Merlin knows I was a moody one."

Draco crossed his legs, wondering how long he'd have to wait here with nothing to distract himself from Potter's musky scent that seemed to envelop the entire office. Potter's gaze flickered over Draco at the movement before flicking away again.

"Mmhm. Mmhm," Potter hummed into the box. "Yes, I *know,* Ron. I'll be careful. Thanks for the concern." Potter rolled his eyes.

Not looking at Draco, distracted by whatever it was he was doing, Potter was relaxed, his veiny hand tapping a biro absently against the desk. Of course, Golden Boy Potter would flaunt the ministry rules and not want to use a standard quill. He was just as arrogant as ever. Unfortunately, Potter's arrogance did not diminish how attractive his hand was, delicately curled around the end of his pen. And *woah,* Draco needed to stop thinking about Potter's hands before his thoughts wandered any further.

Potter made some more humming noises, deep throaty sounds. And since when had Potter's voice been that deep? Good Merlin, Draco just needed to stop thinking altogether at this point.

"Kay, bye," said Potter in a clipped tone. He bent the metal box in half and pulled harshly at his hair, making it even more unruly. He finally turned his attention towards Draco.

"Sorry about that. Ron and Hermione worry about me sometimes."

Draco was struck again by just how green Potter's eyes were. "Is that a felytone?"

"Is it a wh—oh, yeah, it's a telephone. Great Muggle device. Makes communicating with Ron and Hermione so much easier." Potter made a face. "Though it gets terrible service in the ministry with all the extra magic running amok."

He set the telephone aside and walked around the desk, stopping right in front of Draco and leaning his weight back against it. Draco noticed that their knees were a centimetre away from touching; he wondered if Potter also noticed.

"So…" said Potter. The relaxed posture was gone, replaced with tense shoulders and firmly clenched hands. "I don't want to keep you too late. I know you must be dying to get home."

Draco scoffed. "What's there to go home to, besides an empty flat?" And, whoops, he had not meant to say that. That sounded pathetic even to his own ears. He fidgeted with his hair, pulling at one of the locks. It was a bad habit that he had been trying to break. His Mind Healer had said it was a coping mechanism to help him deal with feelings of inadequacy. Draco didn't know if he believed him, but his Mind Healer had yet to be wrong, and he had been seeing the current one for years.

Potter was staring at him again, lost in his own insipid head. Whatever was in there, Draco didn't want to find out.

He snapped his fingers in Potter's face. "Are you even paying attention?"

Potter looked away, his cheeks slightly pink. Was Potter blushing? Weird.

He summoned a blank notepad from somewhere in his mess of a desk. "Alright, I think this would be easier if you were at my level. Would you like to stand… or... er... we could transfigure the chair into, uh, something taller maybe… probably?"

Draco was reminded, yet again, of Potter's masterful way with words.

Draco stood from the chair and Potter took a step away, clearly deferring to whatever decision Draco made. And well, that was a nice feeling—having Potter follow his lead.

Slipping out of his outer cloak, Draco stepped towards the desk. He felt a bit exposed in his plain white blouse and fitted black trousers, but Potter wasn't even looking at him, too focused on his notepad—though Draco was certain there wasn't anything written on it yet.

He dropped down onto the edge of the desk, letting his legs dangle towards the ground. "How about here?" Draco leaned back on his arms in a confident slouch. He could not—would not—let his nervousness show. He trusted Potter to fix things, but he still had no idea what the curse was or what curing it would involve.

Potter glanced up, glanced away, then swallowed.

"Yeah…" He gave a small cough. "Yeah… uh… That's fine. Right there is fine."

He slowly came closer but stopped before fully reaching Draco, like he was purposely trying to keep space between them.

"Okay, so…" He set the notepad down on the desk beside Draco. "I'm just going to take a couple of vitals first and then try to see what could be causing your… ailment."

The word sounded strange on Potter's plebeian tongue and Draco scowled. "Can't you just call it a curse? Doesn't ailment sound like some kind of disease? Do I look like some disease-ridden damsel in distress to you?"

Potter didn't respond but was staring at him again. Was he staring at Draco's hair? Just because he had long hair didn't make him any more of a helpless damsel than anyone else. He would know. His mother with her straight blonde hair was the least helpless person he had ever met.

Potter blinked, coming out of whatever daze he'd just been in, and stepped closer. "Okay… just… stay still, will you?" He started casting Diagnostic Charms and waving his wand in continuous arcs across Draco's body.

Draco felt Potter's magic settling over him, warm and comforting.

They checked his pulse, blood pressure, blood sugar levels, breathing rate, and a whole plethora of other things. Potter's concentration never wavered and Draco began to relax.

They were in the middle of checking Draco's eyesight when Potter stepped forward, right between Draco's legs, and Draco's breath hitched in his throat. They were nearly touching—not quite—but Draco was sure he wasn't imagining the warmth emanating from Potter's thigh so close to his own.

Potter raised a finger and held it in front of Draco's face. "Okay, follow my finger with your eyes." He moved it to the right and then the left, up then down.

"How do you know all this stuff?" Draco said, his eyes tracking Potter's finger. He needed to say *something* to distract himself from Potter's proximity.

Potter didn't even falter. He lit his wand with a *Lumos* and said, "Now look away from the light." With his other hand, he cupped Draco's jaw loosely, almost tenderly, right over the stubble and Draco realised he had forgotten to shave this morning. Potter tilted his head in a few different directions before responding to Draco's earlier question, which Draco was having a hard time remembering with Potter's smooth hand on his chin.

"Curse-Breaker training," Potter answered. What had Draco asked again? Oh, right, where Potter had learned all this Healer stuff. "We almost match the Auror department in terms of injury rate," Potter continued, oblivious to Draco's internal struggle. "We need to know how to react when a curse acts up. If we're working in a tomb five hundred metres underground, there won't be enough time to return to the surface to treat someone if they're injured, so we're trained on how to do it ourselves… or at least treat them enough until we can get them to a Healer, which could take hours."

Potter's voice was a low, soothing rumble, his breath fanning out across Draco's cheek, and Draco felt his eyelids drifting closed, just basking in Potter's attention. Potter's warm palm lingered on his cheek, and Draco felt like he couldn't breathe.

"Who knew that Harry Potter, the poster boy for Gryffindor stupidity, would turn out to have a cautious streak?" Draco said, his voice coming out more breathless than he'd intended.

Potter barked out a startled laugh and released Draco's chin. The skin tingled where Potter's hand had been.

Draco opened his eyes, which was ultimately a mistake because Potter looked much too good smiling softly at Draco like that. Draco felt a shiver of heat travel down his body and settle in his groin. Which, not good. *Abort, abort now!*

"How much longer is this going to take?" Draco resisted the urge to hide the growing bulge in his trousers. That would just draw more attention to it.

"Oh, sorry. I didn't realise the time." Potter glanced briefly at his watch. "Wow, we've already been here for over an hour. I've checked all of the most obvious spells, but nothing has come up yet. I'm afraid it will be a bit longer… or we could, um..." He looked away, scribbling nonsensically in his notepad. "We could, uh, meet again tomorrow after work… if you're amenable."

Draco's insides did a funny little flip. "And what if I'm not… amenable… to meeting again tomorrow?" he said, his voice still coming out somewhat breathless.

Potter's face fell, but he quickly masked it by turning away and ruffling through the pages of his notepad. "I could also see if Curse-Breaker Livingston can have a look at you in the morning. Although, I gotta warn you she specialises more in Dark object tracking and destabilisation rather than human-based curses."

Draco already knew this, of course. He had worked with Curse-Breaker Livingston on multiple occasions; their specialities had a lot of overlap. She would often bring in destroyed objects from her cases and Draco would put them back together again, this time without the Dark curses (obviously). She was a very intimidating woman whom Draco wanted to spend

the least amount of time as possible around, with her nails sharp enough to slice him in half and her pointed canines that glinted when she smiled. Though she didn't smile much and when she did it was more like a leer. Maybe she was a vampire.

Draco shuddered just thinking about her talons getting anywhere near his chin.

"What if I prefer seeing you?" Draco said.

Potter seemed to light up from the inside—he was the Golden Boy after all—smiling that glazed smile again. "Then I would very much like to continue helping you, Malf—Draco." Potter extended his hand.

Against his better judgement, Draco took it and hopped down from the desk. As soon as he released Potter's hand, Potter stepped away, retreating to his own side of the desk.

Draco retrieved his cloak from the rack and slipped it on as a buzzing silence filled the room. He lingered by the door, just like he had this morning, but Potter made no move to dismiss him.

"So, am I seeing you tomorrow then?" Draco made himself look up to meet Potter's eyes.

"Yes, see you tomorrow, Draco." He gave Draco a small smile and Draco smiled tentatively back before stepping through the door.

Was he becoming friends with Harry Potter, *the* Harry Potter? Holy freaking fudge flies, what would Father say about Draco now? Well, it was too bad that Father had gotten himself locked away in Azkaban for the foreseeable future.

Feeling oddly light and unable to keep the smile from his face, Draco returned home.

~ ? ~

Why are you such an idiot?

The next evening when Draco strolled into Potter's office, Potter was waiting for him, a selection of colourful potions spread out on the desk.

"Phase One," Potter said, gesturing in front of him. "We're trying general healing potions and antidotes."

"What kind of antidotes exactly?" said Draco, removing his coat and hopping up onto the other side of the desk. At this angle, Draco towered over Potter. He could easily lean down and enclose Potter in his space, surround him in Draco's own little bubble. But he didn't, because that would be a very bad idea and also because Potter cleared his throat and leapt up from the desk as soon as Draco started leaning closer unconsciously.

"General antidotes for speech-related curses." Potter grabbed the closest bottle and held it up for Draco. "This one here is the antidote for Babbling Beverage, for example."

"Is Babbling Beverage classified as a curse now?" Draco said, maybe a bit more snidely than he'd meant to, but this was going to be an honest-to-Godric disaster if Potter couldn't even tell the difference between Curse-Breaking and Potion counter-acting.

Potter huffed then circled around the desk to Draco's side. He passed the bottle to Draco and their hands accidentally brushed. Potter dropped his hand immediately.

"Part of the brewing process for Babbling Beverage is casting a Babbling Curse after the addition of aconite. Since you seem to be immune to a regular *Finite Incantatem,* which would get rid of a normal Babbling Curse, this is the next best thing to try."

"Since when did you become a potions prodigy?" Draco grumbled, then tossed back the blue potion. Potter looked amused as Draco brought his head back down coughing. *Blegh,* healing potions really were the most disgusting things to have ever been invented. It was as if the universe had decided that any potion remotely good for his body had to taste like absolute shite.

"Feeling alright?" Potter said, grabbing his notepad and biro from the desk.

Draco burped loudly.

The corner of Potter's mouth ticked, but he made no comment, writing something on his notepad.

"Should something be happening?" Draco said after a long moment of awkward silence and the scratching of Potter's quill.

"It takes a bit to kick in."

"Yes, but shouldn't I be feeling something… some sort of feeling fowling howling?"

Potter's quill stopped. "Uh… what was that you just said?"

Draco's tongue was feeling weird, all loose and tingly all of a sudden. "Why did I say that? What's happening dappening dappity flappity?" He turned to Potter, who had fully stopped writing on his notepad and was staring at Draco with wide green eyes.

"Umm…" said Potter eloquently. "I think the potion might have backfired."

"Why would you say that thatter hatter… TATTERY TWITTERY TOTTER POTTER?"

"Because..." Potter pursed his lips, his shoulders minutely shaking, probably trying not to grin.

"Well, are you going to fix it… BIX IT HIT IT DIP WIT?"

Potter coughed into his hand. "Yes, hold on." Potter rummaged through the collection of bottles, finding a small one with gold glitter swirling through it. He still did not pass it to Draco. "Have you… uh… tried saying a regular sentence? Maybe the babbling replaced the questioning compulsion."

"WHAT WHACK THE FUCKITY FRICKITY FRUITY FOIL?"

"Uh huh," said Potter, his face contorting into a strange cross between a grimace and a smirk. "That, uh, still sounds like a question." He was probably barely holding back one of his terrible bouts of laughter that sounded like a clan of screeching mermaids.

Draco couldn't take it anymore. He pounced on Potter, grabbing the gold potion from his hands. Potter, the git, just stood there while Draco lunged across him, plastering their upper bodies together.

Potter blinked and still didn't move, just stared at Draco, their faces mere inches apart.

And what the fuck? Had Potter been hit by a *Confundus?* Why wasn't he moving?

Draco clenched the bottle and retreated, pouring a drop into his mouth. It tasted nauseatingly sweet as it slid down his throat, but at least his tongue didn't feel all loose and tingly anymore.

"So…" said Draco, testing the words carefully, "what other potions do I have to try?"

The rest of the potions only got worse.

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"Phase Two," Potter said, a couple of days later after Draco had tried all of the remaining potions with no change in his questioning abilities, though at one point he had acquired a temporary fire-breathing ability and nearly burned down Potter's office.

Draco was slouching on Potter's desk while Potter paced in front of him. He tended to do that when he was thinking, as if moving his legs around would get his mushy brain running faster.

“This method is still somewhat controversial, but all the Healers I’ve talked to have only had overwhelming successes with it, so I think it’s worth giving it a go. In my experience, an unconventional approach usually works best for these types of situations anyw—”

“Since when were you friends with a bunch of Healers? Aren’t they too busy with their Healer lives to have anything to do with the ministry?” At least that was what Draco had always heard. Healers, especially St. Mungo’s Healers, were notorious for not having any social lives and working one hundred hour work weeks. As if Draco could judge. He barely had a social life, and he worked a normal number of hours a week.

Potter looked at him strangely, sort of squinting, but his eyes were still much too large behind his glasses. “Well… uh… since I dated one of them and stayed friends with him after. It was… uh… it was all over the papers for a while. I thought you would have heard about it.”

“Why would I read that rubbish?” Draco scoffed, mentally noting that Potter had dated a *him* previously. *Interesting* … not that Draco needed to know that. Absolutely no reason at all for knowing that—he was just curious.

Draco never bothered with the papers anymore. He had tired of reading the recurring headlines about Harry Potter this and Harry Potter that. Or if he was particularly unlucky, on the rare occasion when a reporter caught him outside the flat or the ministry and the next day’s paper said something along the lines of “Draco Malfoy, Former Death Eater, Where Is He Now? An In-depth Look At How the Malfoys Have Fallen” with a picture of him stuffing a steak and kidney pie in his face.

Potter shrugged then glanced away. “I don’t know,” he said. “Sometimes I like doing the weekend crossword.”

Which… okay, that was actually kind of adorable. Draco hadn’t even known the *Prophet* had a weekend crossword. It must’ve been a new addition.

“So, anyway,” said Potter. He readjusted his glasses. “This method involves casting a stronger spell to, well sorta, override the previous one.”

“What?” said Draco.

“Okay, so… you know how if you try to petrify someone while also casting *tarantallegra* you get this limbo-ish state where the upper half of their body freezes, but the lower half starts dancing? Now imagine if one of the spells is significantly stronger than the other. The body cannot physically listen to both spells at the same time, so the stronger one takes over and sorta overrides the weaker one.”

“And... are you going to try that method on me?”

“Yes,” said Potter, determined. “We just need to find a strong enough spell.”

Draco nibbled at his bottom lip nervously. Potter quickly looked away again. This all seemed fairly far-fetched. The cure for his curse was to curse him some more? He didn’t want to end

up with permanent curse damage after all this was over. “What kind of spell would override a questioning curse as strong as this one?”

Potter hummed, summoning a book from beneath his desk. It whizzed past Draco’s feet, brushing his ankle and making it tingle.

“I was thinking…” Potter opened the book to a page he had marked. “We could try different silencing spells, ones that could be easily removed. If it works, the spell will override your questioning curse, then when I remove the spell you should be able to speak normally.”

“And what if it doesn’t work?”

Potter looked up and said, “Then you’re no worse off than you were before.” His face was serious, his cheekbones sharp. Salazar’s basilisk, his cheekbones were *really* sharp, like they could cut straight through Draco’s waning self-control and pin him to the desk with barely any effort.

“What spell should we start with?” said Draco, looking away before he could get any more wicked ideas about Potter’s cheekbones.

“Let’s first try a basic Silencing Charm.” Potter moved to stand in front of Draco, pointing his wand towards Draco’s chest. “Okay?” he checked.

“Am I ready?” responded Draco.

“Silencio.”

Draco felt his throat convulsing, the uncomfortable feeling of his airway being blocked off, though he could still breathe.

“Can you say anything?”

Draco opened his mouth, closed it, opened it again. No sound came out.

“Okay good. We’ll wait a couple minutes, make sure the charm sets deeper, then I’ll take it off again.” Potter grabbed his notepad and wrote something in the margin.

It was an unusual couple of minutes, not uncomfortable, but also in no way relaxing. Draco was too anxious without the use of his voice, and Potter was too tense next to him, scribbling away in his notepad. Draco tried sneaking a peak, but all he could make out was a cluster of loops. Was Potter doodling?

The buzzing silence continued and Draco swore with each passing minute he became more aware of Potter’s body beside his—the sweep of his hand, the curl of his fingers, the slump of his shoulders, the stubble on his jaw. By the time Potter decided enough time had passed, Draco’s body was buzzing from merely *sitting* next to Potter.

With a *Finite,* Potter released the spell. “And?” he prompted.

Draco opened his mouth. “Did it work?” he croaked.

Potter drew a long line through the first item on his notepad.

“Alright, next spell.”

Later into the evening, much later than either of them had intended, Potter frowned down at his notepad.

“That’s all that I could think of,” he said. He looked disappointed. At himself, at Draco, at the pesky curse? Draco didn’t know.

Draco was relieved. His mouth had started feeling increasingly dry and scratchy after they’d tried using the Tongue-Tying Curse about fifteen minutes ago. Although that hadn’t been nearly as bad as when Potter had pointed his wand at Draco’s head and spouted *“Langlock”* in a firm voice. At that, Draco’s tongue had curled up onto the roof of his mouth and stuck there. It felt like he was choking after the first few seconds. He didn’t even know where Potter had learned such a spell. “Some professor,” Potter had answered vaguely when Draco had asked.

“There is… one more spell we could try.” Potter tapped the biro on his thigh, leaning back against the desk beside Draco. “I came across it while researching, but the description was very… well, there wasn’t one. The book just said ‘For silencing an opponent. Use sparingly.’”

Draco followed the movement of Potter’s pen. *Tap... Tap... Tap...* it went. *Tap... Tap... Tap… Touch... Touch... Touch… Touch... Potter... Touch... Pott—*

“Draco?”

The tapping ceased, but only because Potter tapped Draco on the shoulder instead.

“What? What happened?” Draco’s head snapped up.

“Hey, uh… if you’re getting tired, we can stop here for tonight and pick it back up tomorrow. We don’t have to try that last spell right now… or at all really… we probably shouldn’t try it —”

“Can we try it?” Draco didn’t even know what he was saying anymore. His mouth was dry, not just from all the curses, and he was having a hard time focusing on anything besides Potter’s denim-clad thigh resting a few centimetres away.

“Alright…” Potter said slowly, like he was expecting Draco to snap at him at any moment. “If you’re sure…”

“Are you going to cast it or not?” said Draco, crossing his legs and sneakily readjusting his trousers.

Potter blew out a breath and mumbled something that sounded an awful lot like “...bossy wanker. Why does he have to be so good looking?” but there was no way Draco had heard that right. He must have started hallucinating things in his tired, frazzled state.

Potter aimed his wand at Draco, not bothering to move from his position leaning back against the desk, and cast.

"Oscausi."

It was terrible. Draco had experienced some truly horrifying things in his life—try topping the Dark Lord setting up in his childhood home—but this was a new kind of terrible. His mouth throbbed, the kind of feeling when he accidentally bit the inside of his cheek while chewing, except the feeling spread throughout his entire mouth, concentrating around his lips.

Or, well, where his lips had just been. Now they were nothing more than a pale patch of skin, as if they had never existed at all. He made a pained sort of whimpering sound when the place where his lips had been stretched and morphed, completely filling in the space and sealing his mouth closed.

"Oh my god." Potter nearly crashed onto the floor in his rush to face Draco. "I didn't know it would—Oh my god, I'm so sorry—I'm going to take it off right away."

Potter raised his wand, but Draco grabbed his hand, stopping him.

"What? You want to wait?"

Draco nodded at him. If the curse was already cast, they might as well wait it out and see if it worked.

"Uhh… okay, I guess. It's your decision." Potter slowly lowered his wand. He didn't seem to notice that Draco hadn't let go of his hand.

They waited in painful silence while the curse settled into Draco's skin.

"Does it hurt?" said Potter, when the silence had become so thick it was suffocating.

Draco gave a one-shoulder shrug.

Potter did not look pleased by his response. "Oh god. If I had known… I would never have suggested… the book said nothing about Dark magic… I didn't even think—"

Draco squeezed Potter's hand, which for some reason he had not let go of but was still clenching tightly.

Potter went abruptly silent, then looked down at their joined hands, seeming to get lost in thought.

Draco gave another squeeze.

Potter jolted and started pulling his hand away. "Sorry, um… I didn't mean to grab you like that…"

Draco clung on tighter, because what was Potter talking about? *He* was the one who had grabbed Potter. Draco *needed* Potter right now, to ground him so he didn't flip out about *losing the use of an entire flipping organ.* Why didn't Potter understand that?

"O-Okay." Potter stopped trying to pull away, letting his hand go slack.

At the end of the specified time, Potter all but launched himself from the desk, waving his wand to release the spell, and dropped Draco's hand.

Draco took a few deep breaths through his mouth. It was a blessed relief having it unsealed, his eating (and complaining) abilities returned. He could go the rest of his life without experiencing that particular feeling of helplessness ever again.

Potter walked around his desk and sank down into his chair. His hands were shaking when he clenched them in his lap.

"That's all for tonight," he said, effectively dismissing Draco.

Draco cautiously got down from the desk and retrieved his coat from the rack. He didn't want to leave just like that, the air thick with unresolved tension and Potter's disappointment. Again Draco had to wonder if it was directed at Draco's curse or Potter himself.

"Am I okay?" Draco said quietly, not wanting to startle Potter who had lowered his head to stare blankly at his desk.

Potter looked up slowly, like he was moving through water. His eyes were rimmed in red. "I'm… glad you're okay, Draco, but I… I made a promise to myself a long time ago that I would never hurt someone again… especially after…" Potter swallowed. "...especially after I fucked up so terribly in sixth year."

And *oh,* that hadn't even occurred to Draco. Draco still carried the scars from those mistakes from Potter's sixth year—they were faded now and essentially invisible, but in the right lighting, the right mood, Draco could still feel them slicing across his chest.

Draco took a step closer. Potter did not move.

"Are you—" Was Potter what? Obviously, he wasn't okay, beating himself up about a past transgression that had happened when they were still children, children sent off to fight an adults' war.

"Was it a long time ago?" Draco settled for instead, and, "Do I forgive you now?"

Potter stared at him but didn't say anything, and Draco didn't know what to do. Should he leave? Should he stay and try to help? This was new territory for Draco, dealing with an upset Potter. What would Granger do? What would Weasley do? He had no idea, but he did know what *he* could do.

He sat down in the chair and leaned across the desk.

"Can I hold your hand for a moment?"

The expression on Potter's face did not change, but his hand twitched in his lap like he wanted to reach closer.

"Can I?" Draco laid both his hands palm up on the desk between them.

Potter hesitated before placing his hand in Draco's hold—it was so warm, so large. Draco began rubbing small circles into it. Potter stared at their joined hands, but it was as if he wasn't seeing them, merely staring blankly in their direction.

"Did you know…" said Draco in a quiet voice, keeping it purposely slow and steady. "...there is a whole subsection of Muggle medicine dedicated to hand and foot massages?"

He pressed at the base of Potter's pinky, slowly caressing the skin. "Did you know they believe that the body is one interconnected system with channels of energy flowing through it… that putting pressure on one part of the body can help relieve pain in another?" He followed the line from Potter's pinky down his palm. "Have you heard of this point here, Heart Eight…" He trailed down to Potter's wrist and pressed lightly next to a jutting tendon. "...and this point here, Heart Seven, that are direct lines to your heart? If you apply pressure to them, did you know that they're supposed to lessen anxiety and depression?"

He rubbed a few calming circles over Potter's wrist and felt him minutely relaxing, his breath coming slower, more even.

"How do you know all this stuff?" Potter asked, his eyes never leaving their connected hands. It was the same question Draco had asked just a few days prior when he had been shocked by Potter's Healer skills.

"Do you remember how St. Mungo's refused to treat my mother after the war?"

Potter grimaced. It had been all over the papers for a while: "The Moral and Ethical Dilemma of Treating Death Eaters at St. Mungo's. Is It Safe? Is It Necessary?" The debate had eventually been won after Granger—with the help of Weasley and the entire Auror department—had stepped in to shut it all down, but by that time Mother's condition had deteriorated to the point that she couldn't even leave her bed, so Draco had taken her recovery into his own hands.

Draco had learned how to make his own potions, how to massage her deteriorating muscle, calm her fractured mind by any means necessary, even if that included using obscure Muggle methods. It had been a long and arduous journey to recovery, but Mother was better now—lonelier and sadder than before, but no longer in physical pain.

Draco set Potter's hand down and picked up his other one that was lying on the desk. "Why don't we just say that you're not the only one who learned how to be a Healer in the past few years?"

"Mmm," said Potter, as Draco started in on his other hand. He didn't even sound like he was listening anymore.

They stayed like that for a while, Potter relaxing more with each sweep of Draco's hands over his palm or his wrist, but eventually Potter blinked, seeming to come back into focus, and slid his hands away. His eyes were no longer red and his face had a blissed-out quality to it.

"Thank you, um, Draco. You didn't need to stay and do that for me." Potter cleared his throat, looking thoroughly uncomfortable, but determined to express his gratitude nonetheless.

"What can I say…" said Draco, flashing a smile. "... other than I'm an expert and it would be such a waste of my talents not to use them on you?"

"Well, thank you anyway. I, uh… I really appreciate it, but I should probably finish up a few things here..."

"Is this your way of kicking me out?" Draco teased.

Potter flushed before responding, "Of course not! I just… I think I need some time to myself… to think… uh, if you don't mind."

"Why would I mind when this is your office after all?" Draco winked as he stood from the chair. At the door, he turned hesitantly. "So, am I seeing you tomorrow again?"

Potter looked up from the desk where he had been staring at his hands. "Yeah, yeah, definitely. See you tomorrow."

With a last little wave, Draco left, Potter's door gaping open behind him.

The next day Potter acted like nothing unusual had happened, though he did zone out a few times at the oddest moments—sometimes while flipping through his notes, sometimes while looking at Draco's hands. Draco followed Potter's lead and didn't mention anything either.

But, when Draco managed to peek in Potter's notepad, on the page labelled *Phase Two,* a large *X* had been slashed across the list of curses in an angry red.

And from then on *Phase Two* was never mentioned again.

~ ? ~

More days passed like this—Draco showing up after work and sitting in Potter's office for an hour, propping himself up on the desk while Potter's magic washed over him. It had almost become a routine by then. By the end of the second week, Potter's office had become littered with books, articles, old manuscripts, and rotting scrolls—all centred around speaking curses.

They were on to *Phase Five* now—at least Draco thought it was *Phase Five.* He might have lost count at some point—where Potter periodically poked and prodded at different body parts belonging to Draco. Sometimes he would cast spells, sometimes he would tell Draco to wiggle an appendage, and sometimes he would simply watch Draco, studying him intently.

After every new spell that Potter tried and failed, Draco became more frustrated while Potter just became more ecstatic.

“I haven’t had a real good challenge in a long time. Usually, it’s just arguing with the goblins about vault security,” Potter explained late one night.

He was holding Draco’s left hand in a warm grip, casting charms over it. Draco had no idea how spelling his hand would in any way affect his speaking abilities, but that was why Potter was the Curse-Breaker, not him. That was also why Draco had stopped paying attention after the first ten minutes and had spent the rest of the time merely enjoying the warmth of Potter’s hand—the gentle way Potter turned Draco’s wrist, the sure way Potter caressed Draco’s palm.

Draco felt himself getting hard in his trousers just from Potter simply holding his hand. To distract himself, he decided to ask Potter questions.

“Potter, can I—”

Potter jumped and dropped Draco’s hand, letting it fall on the desk with a rough slap. Draco winced and shook it out in front of him.

“Um, sorry.” Potter took back Draco’s hand carefully.

Draco tried again. “Potter, how do you know if—”

“Call me Harry.”

Draco squinted at him, but he wasn’t looking at Draco, intently focused on Draco’s hand—rubbing soothing circles, almost mechanically, on the back of it. Draco had never heard of a spell involving hand massages before, but maybe Harry was trying to inconspicuously thank him for the events earlier in the week, even though he was rubbing the wrong spot on Draco’s hand.

“Should I call you Harry then?” Draco said slowly.

“Yes, call me Harry… please.” Potter’s eyes—or actually Harry’s eyes now—flicked up then back down. Those *green,* green eyes.

Draco slumped back on the desk, leaning his weight on his other hand, the one not occupied by Potter—Harry. “What if I don’t want to?” he said. “What if I want to call you Harriet Plotter?” He grinned, showing too many of his gleaming white teeth.

Pott—Harry snorted. “I’ve been called worse before… by you no less.” Draco frowned, but Harry blundered on. “But that’s all in the past. You can call me whatever you want, I guess. I don’t really mind nicknames. It’s what someone close to you would call you, and I never had any growing up.”

The mood in the small office turned suddenly sombre. Draco didn’t know much about Po—Harry’s childhood, but he’d heard the rumours. He’d seen Harry showing up at the start of term skinny and haggard.

Trying to lighten the mood, Draco said, “Oh, is that right? So, are you saying you enjoy ooey-gooey nicknames? How about love, sweetheart, baby?” He made his tone as lascivious as possible.

P—Harry had moved behind the desk now, so Draco couldn't see his reaction to Draco's teasing.

"No, you… uh… I don't… You don't need to call me that." He sounded a bit strangled.

"Are you sure?" Draco purred. He tilted his head back, catching Harry's gaze upside down, his long hair spilling across the surface of the desk. "But how could I resist when you look so lovely in those horrid T-shirts you always wear… or worse, those shapeless jumpers?"

Harry was frozen, staring at Draco and his cascade of long blonde hair. He let out a quiet breath, the air brushing against Draco's exposed neck. Draco shivered and brought his head back to a normal height.

Behind him he heard Harry mumble, "Mrs. Weasley made them for me."

"What's that, lovely?"

There was a loud clatter, like Harry had run into his chair.

"Mrs. Weasley made me those jumpers." Harry took a deep breath then walked back around the desk until he was standing by Draco again, though he didn't go back to standing between Draco's legs.

Draco smirked. "Did I not say they do make you look extra lovely…" He paused. "...lovely?"

Harry stepped away. And *oh shit,* he was making Harry uncomfortable. That was not the goal at all. He just wanted to distract Harry from those depressing memories of his friendless childhood.

Draco scrambled off the desk. "Did I—Should I take it back? Are you—"

Harry continued backing away, running an agitated hand through his black hair. "No, no. It's fine. I just have a sudden headache. Can we call it here for tonight?"

"Are you sure?" Draco took a step forward, but Harry was too far away to reach now. "Are you okay? Did you want me to take you home?"

"No!" Harry shouted, then seemed to catch himself. "I mean yes. I mean it's… it just happens sometimes. I'll be alright getting back on my own."

Draco looked at him worriedly. If it was something he'd said—something he'd done—he needed to figure out what it was and apologise as soon as possible, but Harry was already ushering him out the door and slamming it behind him before he could process exactly what had happened.

Draco stared at the closed door dejectedly and realised that today was Friday. He wouldn't get to see Harry again until Monday. A whole extra weekend with this annoying curse, but Draco found that he didn't mind. The more worrying part was that it would be 3 whole days until he saw Harry again—until he was back in Harry's office, Harry standing between his legs, Harry's magic washing over him.

That was, if Harry let him come back.

~ ? ~

Draco kept himself busy over the weekend. If he idled for too long his thoughts inevitably wandered back to Harry and his agitated expression before slamming the door in Draco's face.

On Saturday morning, he went to brunch with Pansy during which he didn't say a single sentence—well, question—besides "Did he really?" and "Why haven't you dumped him already?" when she ranted about the new imp she was dating, some Italian Quidditch player with large thighs and an even larger ego. The whole time thoughts of "Harry would never do that" and "Harry would be a much more attentive partner than him" floated through Draco's head.

On Saturday afternoon, he Floo-called Theo—even though they spent almost every hour of the workday together—to hang out. Theo invited him over to Nott Manor, which had been left to him after his father had been arrested and his mother had died during the war. They didn't talk much, as was usual at work too, exchanging no more than ten words the entire visit.

"Patio?" Theo asked when Draco arrived by Floo to which Draco responded, "Would I, certainly?" at the beginning of the afternoon and then, "See you Monday," to which Draco responded, "Don't I always?" at the end of the afternoon. But that was simply how his and Theo's friendship was, and Draco really didn't mind it. Sometimes he just needed a friend to sit with and read in silence while unsuccessfully avoiding his whirling thoughts, thoughts that involved a curse-breaking Gryffindor with shining green eyes and shaggy black hair.

On Saturday evening, Blaise Apparated straight into his living room—Draco really needed to update the wards to restrict all visitors, even his *friends* —and dragged Draco out to a new bar in Clapham. An hour and a half into the night, Blaise disappeared with some girl with plastic wings on her back and glitter around her eyes. Draco swore actual sparkles were falling from her skin every time she'd done a body shimmy on the cramped dance floor. A bloke was eyeing Draco up at the bar and last week he might have batted his eyelashes and ground up against him, close enough to feel the stranger's cock growing hard through Draco's tight Muggle jeans that Blaise had insisted on him wearing, but this week Draco threw back his drink—the nasty tequila shot that Blaise had ordered then saddled Draco with when he'd disappeared—and walked right out of the bar.

Draco collapsed onto his bed in his own flat, cold and alone and completely smashed.

On Sunday morning, he was still sleeping, so not very much happened besides a trickle of drool landing on his pillow and some atrocious morning breath since Draco had forgotten to brush his teeth the night before.

On Sunday afternoon, he dragged himself out of bed, dressed haphazardly in the loosest fitting trousers he owned, and knocked on the doors to Malfoy Manor.

“You look terrible,” Mother said, sipping daintily from a teacup which was probably worth more than Draco’s entire yearly paycheck. Draco wanted to smash it.

“Am I not allowed to have fun on a Saturday night?” He took a finger sandwich from the tray, but his stomach gurgled angrily at him and he set it down again.

“And?” Mother prompted. “Did you have fun?”

Draco grunted in response—not the most polite answer, but he wouldn’t exactly call a raging hangover *fun* by any means. He blamed Blaise and his disgusting shots of tequila.

The rest of their weekly afternoon tea was uneventful, Mother making polite small talk while Draco hummed and nodded instead of actually offering up anything of importance.

At the end of their tea, Mother walked him to the doors of the manor, wrapping him in a hug.

“Oh, my darling.” She pulled back but continued holding onto Draco’s shoulders as he tried to shrug away. “He’ll come around soon. No one could refuse you for too long.”

Which, *what?* Did Mother know about his growing feelings for the Gryffindor Golden Boy? In all honesty, he wouldn’t put it past her. She had known he was gay before he had—the way his eyes had lingered a little *too* long on Mrs. Zabini’s fifth husband at the Malfoy Christmas party in the middle of third year. In Draco’s defence, Mr. Zabini the Fifth had been a work of art: luscious black hair, smooth golden skin, bulging biceps fit for a sculpture, and twinkling eyes that lit up a room.

And, fuck. Those traits were sounding awfully familiar all of a sudden. His feelings for Harry may have been going on longer than Draco initially thought.

“How did you know? How do I make it stop?” He clutched at Mother’s hand. She was still so frail, an intermittent tremor running through her damaged muscles that had never fully gone away after the war.

“You always did wear your heart on your sleeve, dear.” She patted his hand, sighing. “And you don’t *make* it stop. Love doesn’t work that way. Either it fades on its own or you embrace it and continue on.” She looked at him sadly. Father was in Azkaban and would be for life, unless a successful appeal went through, which was highly unlikely because who would support freeing a known Death Eater?

Draco hugged his mother again, fully enclosing her in his arms this time and not letting go for several long moments. He understood, in his own way—he had lost Father too.

On Sunday evening, he recounted all of the past week’s events to his Mind Healer who nodded encouragingly and recommended more deep breathing sessions and “Have you reconsidered starting a journal to organise your thoughts? You’re such a detail-oriented person. I think you may find it useful, now more than ever,” to which Draco had muttered, “Do I have to?” and then proceeded to give monosyllabic answers for the rest of the session. It went like that sometimes—Draco unable to open up and express his *deep repressed*

feelings —but his Mind Healer was never deterred and that was why Draco had stuck with this particular one for so long.

On Sunday night, he reheated a meal of roasted chicken and potatoes that Mother had sent back with him and completed the *Daily Prophet's* weekend crossword puzzle in front of his blazing fireplace.

"What is Potter?" Draco scoffed, filling in six across for the clue that went "Someone who makes ceramic vases and also Britain's most recent wizarding hero."

But that was the problem, wasn't it? Draco couldn't stop thinking about Harry Potter—his arms, his hair, his smile. Talking with Pansy, reading on the patio with Theo, clubbing with Blaise, taking tea with Mother, and sitting in front of his own fireplace, all he could think about was Harry fucking Potter.

And thinking about Harry inevitably brought up a whirlwind of nagging questions.

What if Draco had ruined everything? What if he couldn't fix it?

~ ? ~

Monday morning Draco strode into DoMS and SuBS—now renamed the Curse-Breaking Department, or CBD, and *honestly,* who came up with these outrageous names?—and slapped a hand onto Secretary Ning's desk.

She didn't even flinch but continued munching on some type of round colourful candy.

"What is this?" Draco snatched the bag from her desk. "What's a Sour Head?"

"What it says on the tin," said Ning, not looking away from the stacks of papers she was sorting.

"Can I try one?"

"Sure, but just so you know, those are the *super* sour ones. I have another bag of regu–"

"What in the bloody—" Draco spit out the offending candy. It rolled across the desk, leaving a trail of yellow saliva in its wake.

"Seriously?" Ning glared at him. Even with her overly large glasses and purple hair obscuring most of her face, she was an intimidating sight.

Draco quickly backed away from the desk. He had a feeling that if he stood any closer, he would soon find himself with two curses to deal with instead of one and pleading with Harry to fix.

"If I say I'm sorry will you promise not to curse m—"

"Harry!" Ning jumped up from the desk, shoving a stack of papers at Harry who was hurrying towards his office. "You need to sign these as soon as possible and you're late for

your joint meeting with the DMLE and Misuse of Muggle Artefacts… something about singing furniture. You just missed Arthur Weasley's Patronus—he said they're in conference room five, and that Robards is about to send a Howler to the Minister if you don't get there soon."

"Ahh, fuck. Thanks for letting me know. Tell them I'll be right there, will you?" Harry took the stack of papers and unlocked his office door with a wave of his wand before pausing with a baffled expression. "Ugh, Ning… what is this yellow stuff on top here?" He pinched the top sheet of paper between his fingers and held it up.

Ning was quick to throw Draco under the Knight Bus—the abominable hag. She would pay dearly for this later. "Draco's saliva, sir. I'll clean it up before submitting them later."

"I see," said Harry, frowning. He still hadn't looked at Draco or so much as acknowledged Draco's presence. Even Harry oblivious Potter, about as observant as a block of swiss cheese, had to have noticed Draco standing *right there.*

Harry tossed his coat into the office and scribbled a hasty signature across Draco's saliva-slicked paper. He then ran back out, dashing towards the lifts, and Draco *still* hadn't talked to him.

So, Draco sprinted after him, while calling between agonised puffs of breath, "Harry, can you wait a minute? Can I say something quickly?" Again, Draco had to ask himself, why was Harry so bloody fit? It was bloody unfair was what it was.

Draco barely managed to squeeze himself into the lift next to Harry before the doors crashed closed.

"You have about thirty seconds until I have to get off this lift," Harry said, still not looking at Draco.

The lift jostled to a stop and people crowded in, squishing Harry and Draco to one side. Most of them nodded at Harry in greeting, while ignoring Draco completely. The lift lurched again, and Draco stumbled right into Harry who flung out a hand, but immediately dropped it from Draco's waist a beat later. The lift's other patrons shuffled out at the next stop and then it was just Draco and Harry again.

"Harry, can I—" Harry's eyes snapped up to Draco's face. They were still so green. "Can I say sorry for Friday night? Did you know I wasn't trying to make you uncomfortable? How can I make it up to y—"

"You put your hair up," said Harry.

Draco patted his hair self-consciously. Today, it was pulled back into a slick ponytail, not a wisp out of place. It helped Draco feel in control when other things in his life were not.

"Do you ever feel like your life is out of your control, like you need to have at least one thing that you set the rules for yourself?" Harry just stared at him—at his ponytail—and Draco

began feeling a bit unnerved so he tried to joke, “What else are Mind Healers for except telling you to tie your hair up when you’re stressed?”

“You’re seeing a Mind Healer?” And Harry was still staring, but his brow was also furrowed in thought, so at least that was something else besides ignoring Draco or glaring at Draco’s hair.

“Aren’t *you?”* said Draco.

Harry glanced around the empty lift. “Um, no.”

Draco didn’t respond. Everyone he knew saw a Mind Healer. How else were they supposed to cope with the aftereffects of the war? With all the horrible choices they had made? With all the lives they had lost?

Harry looked back at him. “It looks—” His voice broke, a broken raspy sound, and Harry cleared his throat. “It, um, it looks good on you… the ponytail I mean. Not that your hair doesn’t look good down as well. But when it’s up I can see your cheekbones and…” He trailed off, getting that glazed look again before continuing. “Um, you have nice cheekbones I guess is what I’m trying to say.”

Draco felt himself blushing right on his *nice* cheekbones.

“Should I say thank you?” he asked, confused.

Harry huffed a laugh. It sounded a bit hysterical.

Draco turned fully toward Harry then, and Harry froze, his laughter fading abruptly.

“Are we okay, Harry? Do you know I really didn’t mean to upset you?”

Harry fiddled with the sleeve of his jumper. It must’ve been another Weasley sweater, something as frumpy as that.

“Yeah, we’re okay,” he said eventually, and Draco relaxed, tilting his head to the side where a crick had been forming in his neck from all the tension he’d been carrying without realising it.

Harry’s eyes instantly honed in on the movement.

“So, am I seeing you tonight at the usual time?” Draco said when more conversation was not forthcoming. Harry really was a conversational dullard. At least that much had not changed.

“Y-Yeah…” said Harry in a low voice, his eyes glazed over. “The usual time…”

The lift dinged, and Harry was still staring at him like an imbecile.

“Are you getting off?”

Harry jerked, his cheeks blushing a vibrant red. “Oh… I… uhh, yeah… See you later… Draco.”

Draco gave a small wave as Harry bumbled out of the lift.

As soon as the doors closed again and he was alone, Draco dropped his face into his hands.

Ahh, fuck. What was he even doing anymore?

~ ? ~

The remainder of the week followed much the same way. Harry touched him less than usual, stood a little farther away when casting spells, and was careful not to look too long during sessions. There were a few stilted silences when neither Harry nor Draco seemed to know what to say to one another, but otherwise not much had changed.

Draco had taken out his ponytail and he sometimes would see Harry’s hand stretching towards his hair out of the corner of his eye, like Harry wanted to touch it or pull it back up. But then Harry would retreat and avoid looking at Draco for the next fifteen minutes afterwards.

By the time Friday came again, Draco was so aware of Harry’s every movement that he thought he could probably track Harry’s breathing from outer space—quite a feat, but if someone could do it, of course it would be Draco and his precisely-tuned Harry Potter radar.

When Draco arrived promptly at five, Harry’s office was empty and the door was ajar. This happened sometimes when Harry would come rushing in from another appointment but he’d never been almost twenty minutes late before.

At thirty minutes late, Harry finally barged through the door, his hair sticking up and his chest heaving. Except he wasn’t the only one who barged through the door. Dean Thomas, tall and just as handsome as he had been in school, followed him into the room.

The quiet Gryffindor had been an unfortunate crush of Draco’s for all of two weeks during sixth year, when Draco had stumbled upon him and the Weasley pressed tightly together in an abandoned broom cupboard on prefect rounds, and Draco had been plagued by daydreams of *What if it had been him instead of that annoying girl pressed up against that tall, lithe frame?* But then Draco had become distracted by fixing the bloody cabinet, bloody Potter stalking his every move, and the bloody Dark Lord breathing down his neck that he’d forgotten all about Dean Thomas and his tall, lithe frame.

“Sorry, sorry I’m late.” There was an excited sparkle in Harry's eyes as he closed the office door, secluding the three of them in the room, and Draco noticed that Harry had grown almost as tall as Thomas. And when had *that* happened? “I think we’ve been coming at this the wrong way.”

“What do you mean?” Draco was already propped up on the desk and straightened as Harry came closer. He threw an apprehensive glance at Thomas. Why was he here? Wasn’t dealing with one gallant Gryffindor enough?

“I’ve been trying the counter-curse to every spell I could find,” said Harry. “Variations of the Babbling Curse, that ancient spell the Greeks used to use in court, even the Riddle Charm that the sphinxes use, and whatever else, but that’s not it! What if you weren’t hit by a curse at all? Dean has an idea of what might’ve happened.”

He waved Thomas forward, who cleared his throat uncomfortably before saying, “Um, so…” Exceptionally articulate speech was most certainly a Gryffindor trait, Draco decided. “I’ll, uh, just start by apologising on behalf of my brother. Honestly, I have no idea what Leo was thinking, but you know how teenagers get sometimes… too much restless energy over the holidays, always wanting to bend the rules—bend them until they break. Which of course I don’t agree with”—he held up his hands in a placating gesture when Draco made a disapproving expression—“but, uh, well… I can’t say we didn’t break any rules back in our day either. Didn’t we, Harry?”

He and Harry shared a grin, and Draco was hit with the acute feeling of *otherness,* that there was a barrier of closeness around Harry that he could never cross, no matter how much he tried. That made Draco sad, much sadder than he would like to admit.

“But yeah, so basically, when Leo came home for Easter a couple of weeks ago, he and his friends were dicking around by charming Muggle furniture. I only just found out about it because I found a chair that backfired and he hid in the basement of my flat. Godric only knows what would have happened if my Muggle landlord had found it instead of Seamus. I brought it to Harry to help break the charm and, uhh, that’s when he told me that there's been a whole string of incidents recently of talking furniture scaring Muggle shoppers.”

“Not just talking. Some of them were singing, some of them were reciting nursery rhymes. I had to deal with one that wouldn’t stop shouting Shakespear at me. Ugh, that one was the hardest to shut up.” Harry paced in front of Draco and ran a hand through his hair.

“And what has that got to do with me?” said Draco impatiently. The sooner Thomas finished talking and got out, the better.

“Ahh, that.” Thomas rubbed at the back of his neck. “So my brother and his friends… they aren’t the most cautious bunch, you could say.” Harry snorted and Thomas allowed an amused quirk of his lips before continuing. “They were performing most of their charm work in a park just on the border of magical London—perfect spot to hide from detection charms while being able to move the charmed furniture into Muggle areas.”

“Which park was it?” Draco said, hardly believing what Thomas was telling him.

Harry stopped his pacing to look at Draco, half-apologetic, half-earnest. “The same park you were walking past when you were cursed.”

Draco stared at him blankly, because in what reality did that even make a modicum of sense? It was just baffling. Teenagers casting charms in the middle of a *public park?* To think that he hadn’t even been hit by a curse at all but by a charm meant for *furniture?* What was the post-war world coming to?

“They’re really sorry,” Thomas hurried to say. “But they definitely didn’t mean to hit anyone. It was a charm that must have ricocheted and hit you instead. I’ve already scolded Leo thoroughly, and McGonagall has assured me that he’s been sent to detention every day for the rest of the school year, but… uh, well, I was hoping you could, maybe, keep this between us. My brother, he’s sometimes impulsive and reckless…” A Gryffindor through and through then, especially with a name like Leo. How could he be anything else? “...but he’s still young. He’s still learning. If you could just, maybe, not mention this to anyone at the ministry, then it won’t go on his permanent record, and we would both be extremely grateful.”

Thomas was the picture of earnestness, staring imploringly at Draco, hands fidgeting at his sides.

If Draco really wanted to be mean, he would have turned Leo and his friends in right away for threatening the Statute of Secrecy, but he didn’t think Harry would appreciate that. And, Draco was trying to make a conscious effort lately to be nicer after Ning’s comment a few weeks ago. Draco was a nice person and he would prove it to her.

“Is your brother, this Leo character, going to send me a formal letter of apology then, if I don’t report him?” Draco said.

Thomas instantly relaxed and let out a breathless laugh. “Of course,” he said. “I’ll make sure he gets right on that. Him and all his buddies that were involved.” Behind him, Draco could see Harry smiling in approval. Maybe being nice wasn’t so bad after all.

“So does that mean you know how to lift the curse?” Draco asked hopefully, peering around Thomas to look at Harry.

“I should hope so, seeing as I’ve been dealing with those shouting cabinets all week and—”

Thomas’s pocket beeped, and he pulled a small metal box from it—a telephone was what Harry had called it earlier.

“Sorry, I gotta take this.” He grimaced at the screen. “Mum wants an update.”

“No problem,” said Harry, opening the door and stepping aside. “I’ve got it from here.”

“Thanks, mate. I owe you one.” He gave a glance over to Draco. “You too, Malfoy. Let me know if you need anything some time.”

With a final hug containing an excessive number of back slaps and ending in Harry and Thomas closing their right hands into fists and knocking them together—some strange Muggle custom Draco was sure—Thomas left Harry’s office, distracted by his mum talking loudly into his ear.

And, well, the last few minutes had changed everything. Not only did he now know what he had been cursed—sorry *charmed* —with, he also knew why none of the previous cures had worked. Using non-human based magic on human subjects always had unexpected effects. For smaller spells, they were usually controllable, but for larger spells, the effects could be

disastrous. If Draco truly had been hit by one of Leo's wayward charms, then he had been lucky to walk away with the ability to speak at all.

"Well…" said Harry into the sudden silence. He stepped closer to the desk. "Mind if I try something?"

"What else have I got to lose?" Draco quipped.

Instead of answering, Harry got out his wand and stepped right between Draco's legs, which was the closest he'd been the entire week. He put one hand around the back of Draco's neck and, with the other, pointed his wand straight at Draco's throat. Draco was scared, excited, and aroused all at once. He also felt like he couldn't breathe with Harry this close.

"You know the entrance to the Ravenclaw common room? How there's a knocker that makes you answer a riddle before entering?"

Draco nodded, unable to speak.

"Arthur and I have found that the counter-charm they use to put it to sleep for the summer also works on the talking furniture… I'm going to try it on you, if that's okay. It's not normally meant for humans so tell me if you feel any pain or anything weird… weirder than before, I mean."

Draco nodded again.

"Alright," said Harry. He muttered a spell— *"Levisomnus,"* he said, so softly like a lullaby— then touched the tip of his wand to Draco's throat. "Now ask me a question."

Why was this so arousing, Harry ordering him around with a wand at his throat? Draco should have been squirming away and clutching his proverbial pearls out of Harry's reach, but no, here he was, sitting as docile as a dozing Pygmy Puff completely at Harry's mercy.

Draco swallowed, feeling Harry's wand sliding against his Adam's apple, and said, "Why did you become a Curse-Breaker? Why not become an Auror or a professional duelist or something else equally as heroic?"

Harry blinked, the question clearly taking him off guard.

"Oh… um… well." He lowered his wand which came back glowing a bright red. Draco had no idea what that meant. "I was tired of playing the hero for so long. After the war ended I debated going off on my own into the Muggle world for a while, but all my friends are here, all my family." He looked at Draco, smiling softly. "And I love magic, I really do. All the endless possibilities, everything that we're capable of doing, everything that we've already accomplished. I didn't want to just give that up—the magic, that wonder."

His hands gestured animatedly, that excited light back in his eyes. But then, he seemed to catch himself and he let his hands drop from the air. They landed on Draco's thighs and Draco struggled not to gasp in surprise.

“So I decided to stay and research it. I became a Curse-Breaker because I get to research the most ancient, the most creative, the most spectacular spells that magic has to offer. Whether they’re elaborate networks guarding an ancient text from the fifth century or an annoying curse that makes you talk in questions, I get to see them all.”

Draco never remembered Harry being so passionate about anything. He remembered Harry standing across from the Dark Lord, wand steady in his hands, but even then it was fiery determination in his green eyes, not joyous passion.

Harry had been put in a box, just like Draco, moulded into a hero, while Draco was moulded into a Death Eater prodigy. But that wasn’t who they were, not really. Draco was a fixer, a creator, not a blind follower of a sadistic tyrant. While Harry was an explorer, a researcher, not a self-sacrificing war hero—well, he was that too, but he was also *more* than that.

Who would have thought that he and Harry had something in common after all? Certainly not Draco.

And suddenly all of Draco’s feelings—his longful wishes and deepest desires—he couldn’t hold back anymore. Harry was so near, his face so close, his hands on Draco’s thighs.

Draco leaned forward, wanting to bridge that final distance, and Harry leaned away.

“Um…” Harry stepped back, but Draco grabbed his wrist, getting him to stay. “Wait, Harry.”

Harry’s eyes went very wide.

“Tell me if… tell me if I’m seeing things wrong, but I thought there might have been something”—he waved a hand between them—“something here… maybe.” When Harry didn’t move, Draco fumbled on. “But if there isn’t then you can just tell me and I’ll back off. As soon as I’m cured, I’ll leave you alone and you never have to talk to me aga—”

“You’re already cured.” Harry’s cheeks were slowly turning pink and he looked slightly overwhelmed.

“No, I’m not.”

Harry smiled, a wistful smile that seemed almost sad. “You haven’t asked me a single question since you started talking.”

“Buggering hell,” Draco swore.

Harry started to move away again, so Draco grabbed him, this time around the waist.

Harry went rigid under his touch.

“Sorry, sorry.” Draco dropped his hand. At least Harry didn’t continue moving away. “But you never answered me.”

“Oh, did you ask me a question?” said Harry, the corner of his mouth ticking upwards.

“Hey now, don’t be cheeky with me.” And oh, what a relief it was not to be speaking in circles anymore.

Draco scooted forward on the desk and slowly reached for Harry’s hand but he did not touch it, just let it linger a few inches away.

“I like you,” he said. Harry’s eyes went very wide again, his glasses doing nothing to conceal how very green they were. “I like you a lot and I would really like to snog you senseless right now, but I also don’t want to overstep. So I need to know if…” Draco took a deep breath. “I need to know if you want the same thing as I—”

“I do want,” said Harry. He closed the gap between their hands, and Draco revelled in the feeling of rightness that jolted through him. Until Harry frowned. “But I thought you were only flirting with me so that I would help you find the counter-curse. I didn’t think it actually meant anything to you. Ning told me about how you turned down Sommers, so I was trying to ignore how I felt about you.”

Who? Oh, the dull fellow from the club a few weeks ago. Sommers, so that was his name.

“Oh, Harry.” Draco pulled him closer again. This time Harry relaxed into Draco’s touch, letting himself be dragged in until he was pressed flush against the desk, Draco’s legs bracketing his hips. Draco rubbed small circles into Harry’s back through the thick material of his jumper and he felt Harry shudder.

“Why are you such an idiot?” Draco said fondly.

Harry flinched in alarm. “Why are you speaking in questions again? Did I get the counter-curse wrong?”

Draco leaned forward, their faces so close together not even a baby bowtruckle could fit between them. “You are a complete dunderhead. I turned down Sommers because I wasn’t interested in him—I’m interested in *you.* Have been for quite a while now actually,” he confessed.

“Have you really?” Harry whispered. He had been staring at Draco’s lips as he talked and now couldn’t seem to look away.

Draco leaned the last couple of inches and kissed him.

And then there were no more questions after that—from either of them.

~ ? ~

Sunday afternoon Draco knocked on the doors of Malfoy Manor, package in hand.

This was the first time leaving his flat since Friday night when he and Harry had stumbled into the Floo and out into Draco’s tiny living room. They’d barely made it to the rumpled sofa before he was yanking off Harry’s clothes and Harry was pushing him down into the cushions.

He found out a great many things about Harry over the weekend.

The first: Harry gave terrible head, but excellent hand jobs. It was no matter though; Draco had plenty of time to help him practice now that he wasn't worried about his pesky curse anymore. Practice made perfect after all.

The second: Harry's dick was of average length, but *very* wide, so wide in fact that the first push past Draco's rim hurt like a motherfucking firebat in hell and Draco needed a whole 2 minutes of just holding still, Harry hovering anxiously above him on the sofa, to adjust to it. However, once they'd found a rhythm and the pain turned to pleasure, he wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

The third: Harry went wild for nicknames. Call him *sweetheart,* and he would grab Draco around the waist and snog him until they were both panting. Call him *baby,* and he would moan so lewdly that Draco was afraid he had broken him. But… call him *lovely,* and he would flush from head to toe and immediately do whatever Draco asked. Which was how Harry came the third time they'd fucked—up against the wall loud enough for the neighbours to hear—Draco's cock sliding deep inside Harry, Draco whispering filthy things in Harry's ear from behind.

"So good, baby. You feel so good, so tight for me." Harry had let out a guttural moan, the back of his neck flushing red. *"Nnnnh,* Draco, fuck." Harry's body had slid up the wall from the force of Draco's thrusts. Then Draco had said, "Come for me, lovely," and Harry had spasmed in his arms, spilling onto the wall with Draco soon following.

So that was neat, and definitely something to note for later.

Finally, the fourth thing that Draco discovered, the most important thing: Harry *loved* Draco's hair. Whenever he was touching Draco, one hand would be doing whatever it was doing and his other hand would be in Draco's hair—weaving through the strands, gripping a clump tightly, twirling a thread around a finger. He was absolutely *obsessed* with Draco's hair.

For all that Draco griped and whinged, he really didn't mind. He was even a bit flattered by it. Nobody had ever caressed him with such care, paid him and his hair so much attention as Harry did. Well, besides Mother when she used to brush his hair out after a bath, but that hardly counted.

Really, Draco shouldn't be complaining about this discovery. Especially after Harry had shyly asked for Draco to tie his hair up into a ponytail, right before they fucked for the fifth—maybe fifth, could have been sixth—time yesterday afternoon. At least they'd made it to the bed that time. Draco had been resting between Harry's legs, bobbing up and down on Harry's cock—he was showing Harry how a real blow job was done—when Harry had blurted out his request.

Draco had pulled off with a pop and blinked up at Harry, meeting Harry's glazed gaze through his heaving chest hair.

"Why?" he'd said, licking some of Harry's precum off his lips. "So you can pull on it?"

Harry's flushed face had gone even redder somehow, and that had been how Draco'd found himself not ten minutes later on hands and knees with Harry slamming into him from behind. One of Harry's hands had been tight on his hip, holding Draco steady so he could keep up the bruising pace. His other hand had been in Draco's hair, pulling roughly on his ponytail. On a particularly hard thrust, Harry had tugged extra sharply, arching Draco's neck back in a painful stretch and Draco had exploded, his untouched cock spraying across the sheets.

So really, Draco wasn't complaining *at all* about Harry's touching-Draco's-hair obsession, because Draco seemed to have a newly discovered Harry-touching-his-hair counter-obsession. At least they matched.

He had learned a great many more things about Harry over their very *eventful* weekend together—all of Friday night, the entirety of Saturday, and a lazy Sunday morning—but he preferred to keep those to himself for the time being.

As he walked in through the doors of the manor, Mother immediately noticed his beaming smile, but before she could bombard him with questions, Draco set a small package next to the tea set on the table between them.

"What's this?" Mother said, untying the scruffy package that was most definitely not up to her usual gift-wrapping standards.

"A gift."

"Whatever for?" She had finally broken through the outer wrapping and was delicately removing the items inside—two items to be precise, two circular pads about the size of a galleon.

"I finally finished them."

"They're wonderful, dear, but what are they?" She held the pads up, feeling their soft texture.

"Massage pads. They're for when I am unavailable and the tremors become troublesome. These will help. I charmed them to reach any muscle group when activated. All you have to do is put them on your shoulders and say the magic word."

"Simply splendid," Mother said. She reached over and laid a hand on Draco's cheek. "You, my dear, are a wonderful son."

Draco flushed and decided now was a spectacular time to take a sip of his tea.

Mother set her present carefully to the side, then looked over the table at Draco, her eyes sparkling.

"Enough about me," she said. "You must tell me what happened. He said yes, then?"

"Oh, he said more than that," Draco couldn't help but tease. He grabbed four finger sandwiches from the tray. He was positively famished, but he supposed that was what having an increased libido would do to a person.

“Although…” Draco mused. “My neighbours may have to disagree, even with the strong Muffliato we used.”

Mother laughed, a melodic, pleased sound. “Please, darling, spare me the details.”

She spent the rest of their time together not bothering to hide her small smile.

At the end of their tea, Mother walked him to the door and enveloped him in a hug. “I’m glad you’re happy, darling.”

When she released him, Draco took her hand. It felt so frail, so sad.

“You will be happy too, Mother.”

“Maybe someday,” she said. There was a faraway expression on her lovely face, but her cheeks pulled up into a soft smile.

Afterwards, Draco met Harry in Diagon Alley in front of Flourish and Blotts.

This was technically their first proper date and Draco was anxious to see Harry again, even if Harry had crawled out of Draco’s bed merely hours before—more like *fallen* out of bed when Draco had accidentally rolled over and pushed Harry onto the floor. Although sex on the floor had been a highly enjoyable experience, Draco would not recommend it. His knees would've been sore for days if not for the handy healing charms.

The plan was to spend the rest of the afternoon hidden away together in one of the private corners, playing footsie under the table, reading with Draco’s head propped up on Harry’s shoulder, and laughing over how shocked Ning was going to be when they strolled into the office hand in hand on Monday morning. Then in the evening, Draco would introduce Harry to his Mind Healer so they could start their own sessions next week, before Apparating over to Harry’s flat where Harry promised to show him the Muggle television show Jeopardy (“It doesn’t air on Sundays, but they might be showing a rerun,” Harry had said to which Draco had replied, “I don’t care. I’m coming over anyways,” and Harry had simply smiled).

“Ready for our first date?” Harry came up next to Draco, pressing much too close to be mistaken for casual acquaintances. And, Draco thought, maybe he had breached the circle of closeness around Harry after all.

Murmurs erupted around them—hushed whispers of “Is that Harry Potter with Draco Malfoy?” followed by, *“The* Harry Potter? No, it can’t be!”—but neither Harry nor Draco cared.

Harry reached up and tucked a lock of hair behind Draco’s ear. Draco caught Harry’s hand and brought it to his lips.

“You’re lovely,” he said, pressing a kiss to the back of Harry’s hand. The murmurs grew louder; someone even screamed. One passerby walked straight into a lamppost while another fainted.

“Am I?” asked Harry, blushing faintly.

And now that was the question, wasn’t it? One that Draco most certainly had the answer to.

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End Notes

Disclaimer: Wasabi KitKats are not actually that spicy (Draco is just a wimp), but it is true that Japan has the best KitKat flavors. Also, acupressure and reflexology are NOT viable substitutes for actual medical treatment. They are more used as body relaxation and pain management techniques than anything else. Thanks for reading!

🔍 This work is part of H/D Cluefest 2022. You can follow the fest's Tumblr for daily updates. Our agents are currently still undercover and will be unmasked in April. Please show your support by kudosing and leaving comments for our agents. 🔍

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